

Phantoms in the Gulf of Tonkin

Posted on [Tuesday, February 20, 2007](#) by [JoeC](#)

10 False Flags that Changed the World: #2



Until 1964, Vietnam was not a U.S. war.

Sure, the U.S. had sent 400 special forces to train South Vietnamese troops in 1961. And more troops were sent to police the country in 1963. And every now and again U.S. newspapers printed photos of Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire in public.



But, even the threat of Communism toppling regimes like dominoes wasn't good enough to sell a full-blown war. Until August 2...

The Rush to War

On August 2, 1964, [three North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked a U.S. destroyer](#), the USS Maddox. The boat reportedly fired torpedoes at the U.S. ship in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin, about thirty miles off the Vietnam coast.

On August 4, the U.S. Navy reported another unprovoked attack on the USS Maddox and the USS Turner Joy.



Within hours, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a retaliatory strike. As the bases for North Vietnamese torpedo boats were bombed, Johnson went on TV and told America: "Repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with a positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak tonight."



The next day, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testified. He assured Capital Hill that the Maddox had only been "carrying out a routine mission of the type we carry out all over the world at all times." McNamara said the two boats were in no way involved with recent South Vietnamese boat raids against North Vietnamese targets.

At Johnson's request, Congress passed the [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution](#). The resolution preapproved any military actions Johnson would take. It gave Johnson a free ticket to wage war in Vietnam as large as the President wanted. And, true to his large Texas roots, Johnson got a big war: by 1969, over half a million U.S. troops were fighting in Indochina.



The Phantom Attack

Despite McNamara's testimony to the contrary, the USS Maddox had been providing intelligence support to South Vietnamese boats carrying out raids against North Vietnam. McNamara had also testified that there was "unequivocal proof" of an "unprovoked" second attack against the USS Maddox. In fact, the second attack never occurred at all.

At the time of the second incident, the two U.S. destroyers misinterpreted radar and radio signals as attacks by the North Vietnamese navy. It's now known that no North Vietnamese boats were in the area. So, for two hours the two U.S. destroyers blasted away at nonexistent radar targets, and vigorously maneuvered to avoid phantom North Vietnamese ships.

Even though the second "attack" only involved two U.S. ships defending themselves against a nonexistent enemy, the President and Secretary of Defense used it to coerce Congress and the American people to start a war they neither wanted or needed.

The War Powers Resolution



After the Vietnam War turned into a quagmire for the U.S., Congress decided to put limits on the President's authority to unilaterally wage war. Thus, on November 7, 1973, Congress overturned President Nixon's veto and passed the [War Powers Resolution](#).

The resolution requires the President to consult with Congress before making any decision that engage the U.S. military in hostilities. It's still in effect to this day.

"If we quit Vietnam, tomorrow we'll be fighting in Hawaii and next week we'll have to fight in San Francisco." ~Lyndon B. Johnson.

"We are fighting these terrorists with our military in Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond so we do not have to face them in the streets of our own cities." ~President George W. Bush.

Same tune, different song...

* * *

Go to the next article in this series:

[The September 11, 2001 Attacks.](#)

Go to the previous article in this series:

[U.S.-Sponsored Terrorism: Operation Northwoods.](#)

Go to the original article in this series:

[10 False Flags that Changed the World.](#)

 Share

 Tweet

 Share

 Email

 ShareThis

 Like

 1

 +1



This entry was posted in [History](#), [Politics](#) and tagged [false flag](#), [Gulf of Tonkin](#), [Lyndon B. Johnson](#), [Robert McNamara](#), [USS Maddox](#), [Vietnam](#), [Vietnam War](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).